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# Odyssey: Thinking Creatively

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## Activity Summary

A brief activity that encourages creative problem solving and energizes a group.

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## Goal

- To encourage participants to think unconventionally and creatively.

## Group Size

15 to 25 people.

## Time Required

20 to 30 minutes, depending on group size.

## Materials

- 4 to 5 interesting household objects that could conceivably be used for several purposes, such as an extension cord, unique cooking utensil, office item, or a tool.

## Physical Setting

A space large enough for all participants to see one another.

## Facilitating Risk Rating

Low to moderate.

## Process

1. Introduce this activity as a way to challenge our creativity, think unconventionally, and be creative.
2. Ask whether anyone is aware of the Odyssey of the Mind program from Creative Competitions, Inc. If no one volunteers, share the origins and purpose of the program:

"Sponsored by NASA, among others, Odyssey of the Mind is a school program designed to foster creative thinking and problem-solving skills among students from kindergarten through college. Students solve problems in a variety of areas with a variety of different tools. By encouraging children to solve problems in a creative and unique way as a team, the program helps them to learn lifelong skills, such as working as a team, evaluating ideas, making decisions, and creating solutions, while developing self-confidence from their experiences."

3. Now that the participants know what Odyssey of the Mind is all about, encourage them to think differently about the first object you have in your hand. For example, take an extension cord and wrap it up, then display it where everyone can see. Say that it could be an extension cord (traditional thinking) or it could be a whip. Or it could be a lasso. Ask for other creative ideas.  
*(3 minutes.)*
4. Tell the group that you are going to pass "something" around the room, and as each person receives it he or she is to explain to the rest of the participants what it could be. (Tell them that it is okay to pass if they don't have an idea to share quickly. Otherwise, you can get bogged down.)
5. Hand one of the other objects to one of the participants and ask him or her to think creatively. Ask, "What could this be?"  
*(3 minutes.)*
6. Pass the item among all participants and then introduce one or two other objects.  
*(5 minutes.)*
7. Use the following questions to debrief and summarize this activity:
  - What inspired your creativity?
  - What made it difficult to be creative?
  - Did you become more or less creative as you listened to others' ideas?

- How can you apply this lesson when your work group is required to be creative?
- How can you transfer what you learned into working with thoughts and ideas, rather than physical objects?

(10 minutes.)

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Submitted by Kristin J. Arnold.

*Kristin J. Arnold, M.B.A. C.P.C.M., specializes in coaching executives and their leadership, management, and employee teams, particularly in the areas of strategic and business planning, process improvement, decision making, and collaborative problem solving. An accomplished author and editor of several professional articles and books, as well as a featured columnist in The Daily Press, a Tribune Publishing newspaper, she is regarded as an expert in team development and process improvement techniques. She has provided process facilitation, training, and coaching support to both public and private sector initiatives.*